



Session update from Olympia

April 11, 2011

This is Your House...and Senate!

The debate in Olympia was much louder last week as thousands of protestors travelled to our State Capitol to demonstrate. While each day of demonstrations voiced concerns with the House's proposed budget, those speaking came from backgrounds as diverse as Washington State itself.

On Wednesday, a group of demonstrators spent the night on the hard, cold marble floor of the Capitol Rotunda. Late Wednesday evening I had an opportunity to meet with them and carry on a spirited discussion.

Thursday saw heightened levels of demonstrations. About 500 healthcare workers marched on the Capitol, fighting against proposed cuts to home and long-term care hours among a host of other issues.

Our Democracy is only as strong as those who shape it. Our system works when people stand up and speak out, organize and agitate. On Thursday, the doors of the Capitol Building were closed briefly to the public because of the arrests outside the Governor's office.

As a public body, doing the public's work, in the public's house, I did not agree with this decision, nor was I informed of it beforehand. My Caucus and I agreed that the Senate would only resume floor activity after the building was re-opened. I released this statement to the media:

"This evening, the doors of the capitol building were closed briefly to the public because of earlier arrests during a protest outside the Governor's office.

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“The Senate Democratic leadership team did not agree with this decision and was not informed of it beforehand. We cannot presume, based on the actions of others, that individuals who are exercising their first amendment right to free speech intend to be disruptive or unlawful.

“On behalf of the public, the Legislature is heading into the critical final weeks of the 2011 regular legislative session. But our leadership team was not in support of conducting public business while the proceedings were closed to the public, and resumed floor activity only after the building was re-opened.”

On my watch, as Senate Majority Leader, I am committed to ensuring that the Capitol, where the people have sent legislators to debate and conduct their business, will continue to operate in a transparent and participatory manner.

Friday marked the culmination of the demonstrations, as thousands of Washingtonians converged upon Olympia to voice their concerns. From laborers to elementary school teachers, they represented working families across the state – all fighting for their and their children’s future.



Senator Brown, Representative Billig, Representative Pedersen and rally attendees outside the Capitol

With each day of demonstrations, the chant grew louder and louder and the message clearer and clearer. “This is our House!” they said.

The folks who came to Olympia were absolutely right – this is your house, and Senate for that matter, and that is with me every single day I have the honor of serving as your Senator.

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House Budget Takes Shape

Last week the House of Representatives released its operating and capital budget proposals. The House operating budget — the budget that pays ongoing costs such as state salaries and services — reduces spending by another \$93 million for the rest of the 2009/11 biennium and generally continues the reductions made in the two earlier supplemental budgets. For the 2011/13 biennium the total budget is \$32.419 billion, or slightly less than the 07-09 biennial budget of \$32.6 billion, and leaves an ending fund balance of \$795 million in anticipation of unanticipated needs. The budget reduces public services by nearly \$4 billion.

The House operating budget also relies on \$300 million through the privatization of liquor distribution and shifts funding away from the Public Works Assistance Account, the Fair Fund and the Life Sciences Discovery Account.

You can read the House's full operating budget document [here](#) and the House's press release [here](#).

The House capital budget — the budget that pays for the construction of schools, prisons and other state facilities — sets the state's bond capacity at \$1.43 billion for the 2011/13 biennium. You can [see the full House capital budget here](#).

Senate Budget Proposal

The Senate budgets are scheduled to be released tomorrow. Though there will be differences in the two chambers' budgets, the expectation is that they will have much more in common than not. The challenge of writing the 2011-13 biennial budget is enormous because there are no federal funds and no new revenue sources to draw from. Vital and valued services will be cut. Many of these are public services that I took office to protect and grow – like public education, public safety and health care. But, we are faced with a stark reality and have few options to choose from.

After this is released, we begin negotiating all three of the state budgets (Capital, Operating, and Transportation). As these discussions continue, I will work with my colleagues to pass a cohesive budget that is responsible, thoughtful, and sustainable in these hard economic times.

With these talks in mind, the last two weeks of the 2011 legislative session will be two of the most important and the most challenging. As these final days unfold, I will be in constant communication providing updates along the way. If you ever have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to [contact my office](#).

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Click [here](#) for contact information for my Olympia or Spokane office.

